

DIAMOND~DICK

BOYS BEST

JR. WEEKLY JR.

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

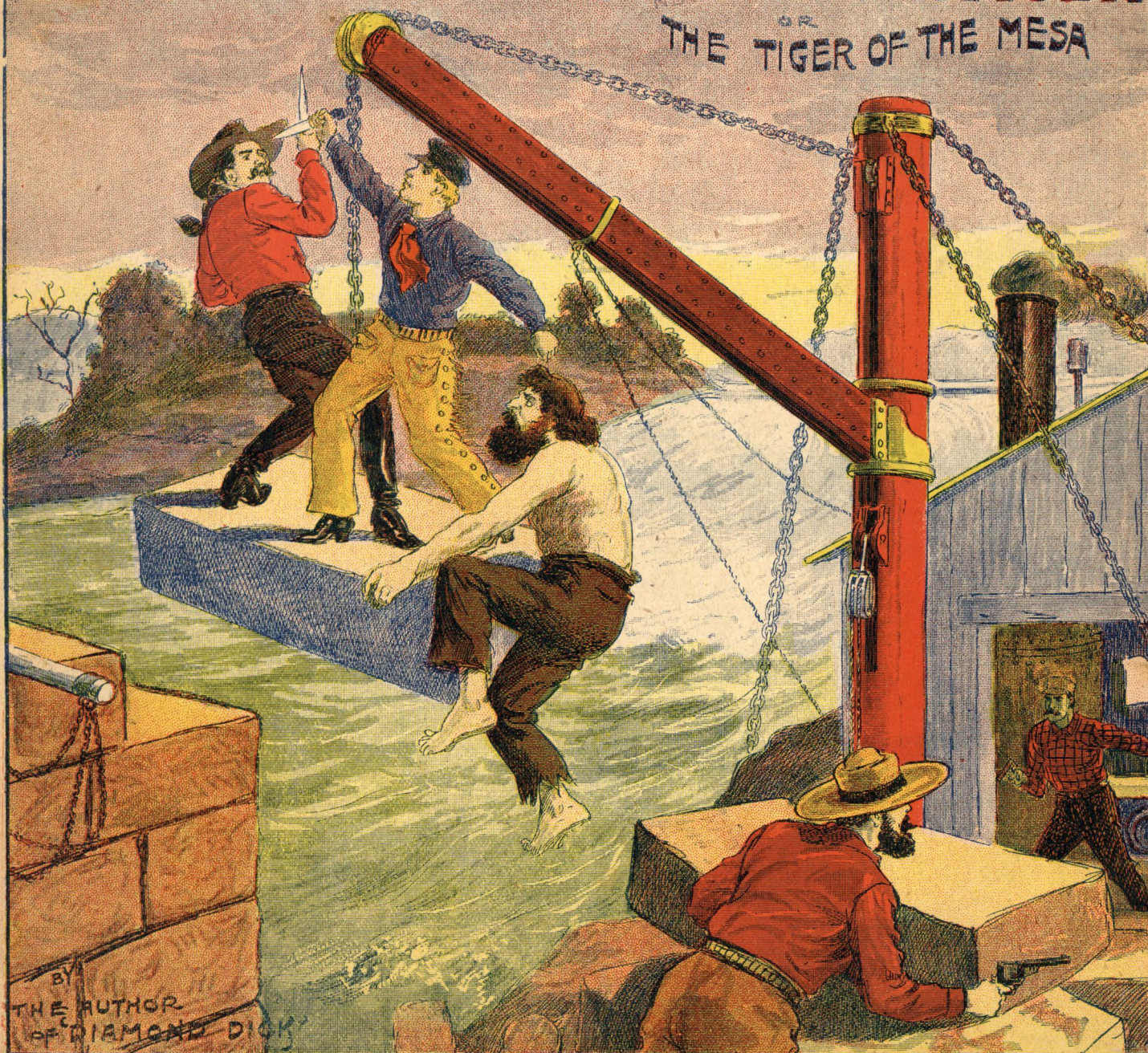
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DIAMOND DICK JR.'S BIG WAGER

THE TIGER OF THE MESA



BY
THE AUTHOR
OF DIAMOND DICK

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No. 299.

NEW YORK, July 5, 1902.

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DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S, BIG WAGER;

OR,

The Tiger of the Mesa.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE FANDANGO.

Old Carlos Pitero tossed off about three fingers of pulque and then leaned back in his chair and looked at Tadeo Romero, who sat opposite him at the table.

Through the open door came a rattle of castanets, a jingling of tambourines, and a twanging of guitars, accompanying a rhythmic shuffle of feet and shouts of merry voices.

Old Carlos and Romero were alone in the little room.

"Carramba! but they are having a gay time," cried Pitero, "and it's well they should. My son, Juan, doesn't get married every day in the year, and this fandango should be the gayest we have had."

"But why do you invite your enemies to it?" asked Romero, carelessly.

"My enemies? Que! And neither do I. This is a place for friends, not enemies."

"Nevertheless, one of your most bitter enemies is yonder, in the ballroom."

"His name?"

"Enrique Guardinas."

Old Carlos' face became fairly livid.

"Impossible!" he returned, bringing his fist down on the table with terrific force.

"I have met him face to face," said Romero, quietly. "He is disguised, but I knew him the moment I set eyes on him."

"Why should he come here? He knows that the Guardinas and the Piteros face each other only with daggers drawn and murder in their hearts. The risk Guardinas would have to run in coming here is so great that surely you must be mistaken."

"I have spoken the truth."

"Then, poor Dio!" cried the old man, starting up and shaking his clinched fist in the air, "he shall not leave this house alive."

For an instant Pitero stood there looking his anger into the eyes of Romero, but before he could make a move to carry out his purpose a hoarse cry echoed through the rooms, bringing the music to a quick stop and causing the dancers to pause in the midst of their revelry.

It was a wild cry of "Murder!"

Had some of the Piteros already pierced the disguise of the rash youth, Enrique Guardinas, and demanded the penalty of his life?

"There!" exclaimed old Carlos, "some one has saved me a bad job. Let us go and see about it."

Romero followed the old man out through the gayly-bedecked ballroom and on into a chamber opening off it to the left.

There a terrible scene met their eyes.

It was not Enrique Guardinas who lay stretched upon the floor, but Juan Pitero!

Above the prostrate form stood a stalwart youth holding a blood-stained knife in his hand.

Surrounding these two stood a little group stricken to silence and inaction by the terrible affair that had just happened.

Against the wall in one corner, his arms folded across his breast, leaned the motionless figure of a young man watching all that took place with the eye of a hawk.

"Juan!" cried old Pitero, dropping on his knees beside his son.

With trembling fingers the aged Mexican felt about his son's neck.

"He is dead!" he muttered, drawing back, "and the talisman is gone! He could never have been slain while that talisman was upon his person."

For a moment Carlos Pitero seemed overcome with grief; then, with a wavering cry of fury, he leaped up, sprang at the youth who was holding the knife, and tore from his face the false beard that partially covered it.

"Enrique Guardinas!"

"Guardinas, Guardinas!" echoed the crowd.

"He murdered my son!" screamed old Pitero, "and I will kill him! Blood for blood! His life for Juan's!"

Pitero held a naked knife in his grasp and would have used it had not the motionless figure in the corner become suddenly imbued with action and, rushing forward, knocked the knife from his hand.

"Stop! he did not murder your son!"

The old man recoiled.

"Who did, then?"

The young fellow dropped on one knee beside the dead man and lifted one of his stiffening hands.

One of the fingers was deformed, so that the nail grew over it and curved downward, like a talon of some bird of prey.

Beneath the talon-like nail was a triangular piece of dark skin that had evidently been raked from the face or hands of the murderer by Juan, in his death struggle.

The young fellow explained this, called attention to the fairness of Enrique's skin and defied those present to find a scratch upon him.

"Did you see the murder committed?" asked Pitero.

"No."

"Then why do you state that the murderer is not Guardinas?"

"There is not a vicious line in Guardinas' face. He is incapable of committing such a deed."

All eyes were turned upon the youth from whose face old Pitero had torn the disguise.

There was horror in his eyes and an appalled expression on his countenance, but there was little of fear to be detected in his demeanor.

On the contrary, he looked around on those about him with the bewildered air of one who seemed to be in a trance.

"Whose knife is that?" queried the young fellow who had championed the cause of the supposed murderer.

Romero picked up the knife that had fallen from Guardinas' grasp, and examined it carefully.

Shaking his head, he passed it to the father of the murdered man.

Old Carlos shuddered slightly as he took the bloody weapon.

"I never saw this before."

"Give it to me!"

The knife was handed to the young fellow who raised it aloft.

"Have any of you ever seen this blade before?"

No answer from the little group of spectators.

"Do none of you recognize it?"

Still no answer.

The young fellow flung the knife toward the wall, and it struck point first and clung quivering to the planks.

"Some one unknown to you must have committed the deed."

"No!" cried Pitero; "it was that scoundrel yonder who murdered my son. The knife is his! Let him deny it if he will!"

Guardinas' eyes had been wandering about the room in a vague way, and they now rested on the door.

He seemed to take absolutely no interest in what was going on about him.

"I will stake my life on this young man's innocence," cried the champion; "I know an honest man when I see one, and I tell you that Guardinas is incapable of committing a cold-blooded murder such as has been committed here to-night!"

"This is child's play!" cried old Carlos. "Are you my friends that you stand here withholding vengeance from my son's murderer?"

"Who raises a hand against him, raises a hand against me! It is my business to revenge him, and revenge him I will. Stand aside!"

Simultaneously with the voicing of these words, a beautiful girl, white as death, ran into the room.

Stooping, she picked up the knife that Pitero had dropped and faced Guardinas.

As Guardinas' eyes rested upon those of the girl,

Juan's widowed bride, all his courage oozed out at his finger tips. His cheek grew pale, and he tried to speak, but his voice choked, and he could say nothing.

"Away from this, Monica!" cried Pitero; "this is no place for you. Leave us to deal with him!"

At these words those present shook off the lethargy that had held them as in a spell.

With wild shouts, they rushed toward Guardinas.

Seeing his great danger, the youth turned, ran across the room and sprang through a door, which he closed after him.

Pitero and his people would have followed, but the young fellow who had sought to reason with those present, proved doubly the suspected youth's protector now.

Throwing himself in front of the door, he drew two revolvers and his blue eyes peered resolutely across the sights.

"Halt!" he cried, in ringing tones. "You shall not kill an innocent man!"

As it was absolutely certain that the young fellow meant business, the pursuers came to an abrupt standstill.

"You shall not cheat us out of our vengeance!" shouted old Carlos.

"I have no wish to do that. Although old Carlos Pitero would take the law into his own hands, all throughout this section of Arizona he is known as a just and honest man. Let him throw his prejudices aside and consider the proposition I have to make him."

For a brief interval there was deep silence; then Pitero asked:

"What is your proposition?"

"I will wager my life against that of your son's murderer. In other words, if within three days I do not bring the murderer to you, I, myself, will come forward to bear the penalty."

It took some time for this singular proposition to filter its way through the minds of the Mexicans; when, finally, they did understand it, a few of them shrugged their shoulders and laughed derisively.

"Who are you?" asked Pitero; "and why have you come to this fandango unbidden?"

"Bertie Wade is my name," replied the blue-eyed youth; "I am also known as Diamond Dick, Jr. It may be that you have heard of me? If so, my word ought to be as good as my bond."

"Not in this instance," said Pitero. "Get away from that door or the consequences fall upon your own head!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., smiled slightly.

"You are welcome to enter this room," said he, "but it will avail you nothing. Guardinas made his way through a window, mounted his horse and got safely off some time ago. But to the other matter: Will you consider my proposition?"

"Impossible!" said Romero.

"Why?"

"In making a wager, it is customary to place the stakes in the hands of a third person. A man's life is something that cannot be so placed."

"Wrong, Romero!" said Pitero, and thereupon he whispered in his friend's ear.

"Carraca!" muttered Romero, with flashing eyes; "perhaps this strange bet may be made to serve after all."

Pitero turned to Diamond Dick, Jr.

"The difficulty may be overcome. Even by coming to this fandango Guardinas, in my estimation, has forfeited his life, as there is a feud between his family and ours. But I would know who has been diabolical enough to come here and murder my son in his own home. You say it was not Guardinas and offer to wager your life against that of the real murderer. I accept the bet. You can put up your part of the stakes."

"I must be free to come and go wherever I will," returned Bertie.

"It shall be so."

Placing his fingers to his lips, Pitero blew a shrill whistle.

The crowd dropped back expectantly.

All eyes were fixed on a door that communicated

with the little plaza around which the Mexican's house was built.

They had not long to wait.

Very shortly the door was burst open, and a creature who seemed more beast than human, sprang into the room.

Presumably a man from the fact that he walked erect, the creature stood over six feet in height and wore merely a pair of trousers, girdled about the waist with a piece of horsehair rope.

His bared breast and back were covered with hair, like a coyote, and his beard was so thick and covered his face so completely that the only features to be seen were his eyes, which were small, black and glaring.

Hair dark as a raven's wing fell over his neck in tangled masses.

His arms were long, almost to deformity, while his bared feet were of immense size.

Stopping at old Pitero's side, this creature spoke, or, rather, growled, something which he, alone, understood.

"For three days," replied Pitero, looking at the queer form before him, but motioning in Diamond Dick, Jr.'s direction, "you are to hold this young fellow's life in your hands. Follow him everywhere, let not a move of his escape you. If, at the end of the third day, he comes not back here with the murderer of my son, Juan, you are to kill him!"

The creature glared at Diamond Dick, Jr., and grinned, showing two yellow, tusk-like teeth through his matted beard as he did so.

Bertie merely gave him a look of contemptuous disgust.

"Diamond Dick, Jr.," went on Pitero, "you say Guardinas is innocent where we all believe him guilty. If you are bluffing, if you wish to withdraw your wager and not accede to the disagreeable terms of this contract, you have but to say the word!"

"My wager stands!" was Bertie's quiet reply.

"Then I give you, for three days, into the keeping of the Tiger of the Mesa! You are free to go."

Without a word, Diamond Dick, Jr., turned and

left Pitero's house, followed by the creature who, for three days, was to be his shadow—perhaps would attempt to be his slayer.

CHAPTER II.

DIAMOND DICK, JR.'S, MISSION.

When Bertie left old Pitero's house he sought out his own horse from the many that were tied in front and rode off through the moonlight.

After him, jogging along the trail at a dog-trot, came the "Tiger of the Mesa," as he was termed.

Occasionally Bertie glanced backward over his shoulder at the huge form swinging along in his trail.

Once the youth muttered:

"It must be! I can't be deceived. But there are others, and he must be made to tell me who his co-conspirators are."

For some time Bertie did not look back.

When he did, he discovered that the Tiger of the Mesa had vanished.

Close upon the heels of this discovery the form of a man stepped out into the trail from behind a fringe of bushes at the roadside and halted the youth's horse by tossing his arms above his head.

"Who are you?" asked Bertie, his alert hand creeping toward his revolver belt.

"Enrique Guardinas!" was the answer.

"Very good; you are just the man I wish to see."

"I could not allow you to pass, senor, without stopping you!"

Bertie dismounted, gave a swift glance down the road over which he had come, and then turned to Guardinas.

"I wish no thanks," returned he, "for saving the life of an innocent man."

"But you have taken a terrible load upon your shoulders. Listen, Diamond Dick, Jr.; I did not leave Pitero's house at once upon entering that room. I heard distinctly all that passed between you and those who would have had my life, and I wish

to say that, in attempting to befriend me, you have placed yourself in great peril."

A smile curled Diamond Dick, Jr.'s lip.

"You think me in danger from——"

"The Tiger."

"You remained long enough to hear that part of it, then?"

"I did, and I desire to tell you this: If you are not successful in finding the real murderer within the three days given you, not you, but I, will pay the wager."

"I beg you not to worry about either of us being called upon to make good such a tragic bet. There is one thing, however, which I would like to ask you. What do you know about this creature who is fancifully termed 'The Tiger of the Mesa'?"

"Very little, except that he is all, and more, than his name implies. I believe he would commit murder for the sheer delight of shedding human blood. He set upon my father once, while he was crossing the desert, and but for the arrival of timely assistance would have slain him. Since then he seems to have borne a special grudge against all of our family."

"He seems to be very friendly with the Piteros."

"He loves old Carlos as a dog loves his master."

"This seems strange in a man who appears to have lost well-nigh all the mental qualities as well as the physical attributes of a human being."

"It is strange, senor, but it is true."

"What is there between your people and the Piteros?"

"A feud of long standing that has claimed many victims on both sides. I made no explanation because I knew it would be useless."

"Will you explain to me?"

"Certainly."

"Then why did you put your head in the lion's mouth, as it were, by visiting the fandango?"

Guardinas hesitated a moment and it was plain to Bertie that he was somewhat embarrassed.

"Well," he finally replied, "both Juan and I courted Monica Castelar. Juan won the prize, and I

went there, disguised, to seize and bear her away from under the very noses of the Piteros——"

"Whether she would or no?"

Bertie could scarce restrain a smile.

"You do not know these Mexican girls, *senor*," replied Guardinas, passionately. "Nine-tenths of them do not know their own minds—but enough of that. I found that the wedding had taken place the day before the fandango, and I was defeated. While seeking an exit from the house I heard that cry of murder. It was almost at my elbow. I turned and saw only Juan lying on the floor, almost at his last gasp. I forgot that he was my bitter enemy, forgot what the consequences to myself might be, and rushed to his side and withdrew the knife. Then the people came in, and what happened after that was like a dream. But the saints sent me you for a protector, and, by Our Lady, I shall never forget the service you have done me this night."

As he finished, Guardinas grasped Bertie's hand and pressed it.

Enrique Guardinas was a blue-eyed Spaniard; his skin was fair, and his hair was light.

While talking, his voice was musical and his gestures graceful, and at the end of the explanation Bertie wrung his hand with genial warmth.

"Although everything seems to be against you, Enrique," said Diamond Dick, Jr., "I admire your nerve and believe fully in your innocence. I read your character in the look of horror that came into your eyes as you stood over Juan with that bloody knife in your hand."

"Thank you, *senor*. But you—did you see the murder committed? Do you know who the real murderer is?"

Bertie shook his head.

"The alarm that called you to the scene also called me. If you were in the room, did you not hear what I said about Juan's crooked finger and talon-like nail?"

"Ah, that was before I fled. The events of this night have been so exciting that I had forgotten for

the moment. Si, si! You were clever, indeed. The murderer's skin must have been dark."

"Exactly."

"I will leave you now, *amigo mio*, but I warn you that I shall watch your every move. If you are not successful in finding the murderer, I pay the debt."

Diamond Dick, Jr., laughed.

"We will talk of that later. Don't go just yet. Wait."

The youth again looked down the trail.

"Now that you have told me what brought you to the fandango, I will be equally frank in telling you what took me there. You are acquainted with the section of country just over the border, if I am not mistaken, and might hear or see something which could be turned to my advantage.

"Two days ago a freighter named Robinson, transporting goods from the Southern Pacific to the town of Okotea, was set upon and murdered—the most of his goods being stolen.

"I came upon the scene a day later. At that time the ruin of the freighter's outfit was complete, Robinson himself lying dead in the wagon with a shot through the lungs.

"I had but two clues to guide me in seeking to run down the perpetrators of this outrage—for I could not leave the country content with simply turning the matter over to the sheriff.

"The clues I allude to were these: The footprints of the men who were guilty, and the fact that the final struggle taking place in the wagon, a large bottle of sulphate of silver in a box of druggists' supplies was broken and must have left marks on the hands or faces of at least two of the murderers.

"Of course, those who attacked the freighter came to the scene in a wagon, but they were all on the ground when the attack took place."

Bertie paused long enough to reach into one of his saddlebags and draw out what seemed to be the rough model of a ponderous human foot.

"One of the imprints was made by a foot like this," he went on. "In the wet, clayey soil the impress was held and the morning sun baked the clay

and left almost a perfect matrix. From the box of druggists' supplies I secured a small quantity of plaster of Paris, and here is the result.

"From other sources I learned that probably the only foot in the country resembling most this plaster model belonged to the Tiger of the Mesa, who lived with old Carlos Pitero, on his ranch. For this reason I went there to investigate and dropped in quietly while the fandango was on. The tragedy which occurred did not afford me time to complete my investigations, but I fully believe I am on the right track."

"I think you are, senor," said Guardinas, gazing at the plaster cast with mingled wonder and surprise. "Certainly your ingenuity deserves success. I heard of the freighter being murdered, but had no idea who the men might be that committed the deed. You say there was more than one in the job?"

"Yes; there were two others."

"And what kind of a mark would sulphate of silver leave?"

"It would stain the skin black."

Guardinas was silent for a moment; then he went on, musingly:

"Can it be possible that Ganz or Hillner had anything to do with this murder? It may be; it is possible."

"Have you any clues to offer me?" queried Bertie.

"I believe I have, senor. I am superintending the construction of some railroad work about twenty miles from here. The work consists in putting in stone abutments for a bridge over Carter's Creek. Carter's Creek is dry, except in rainy seasons, when it flows a veritable torrent. The creek is higher now than it has been before for years, and we are pursuing our work under some difficulties. There are two men on the job whose names are Ganz and Hillner. They came to me with rather shady reputations, but, as they are good workmen, I kept them. Some three days ago they went away abruptly and when they came back each man had on a suit of new clothes, and Hillner's left hand was swathed in a bandage and hung in a sling from about his neck. On Ganz's cheek were five black marks, and it seems to me,

now, that I suspect the two men, that those marks might have been left by the freighter's fingers and thumb."

"That's possible," broke in Bertie. "Robinson's right hand was covered with the sulphate."

"Then, taking the fact that they were gone at about the time the murder was committed, all this begins to look rather dark for Ganz and Hillner. I asked them where they had been, when they got back, and they answered that they had been to Okotea, had gambled successfully, and had bought themselves some new clothes. I noticed that Ganz seemed anxious to keep turned from me that side of his face which bore the black stains. Hillner explained his bandaged hand by stating that he had gotten into a fight and had been injured in that way. At that time I had no reason to think that these men had had a hand in the killing of Robinson, so I set them to work. Hillner, who is something of an engineer, I set to running the engine that operates the derrick hoist, for he can do that very well with one hand. It is a singular coincidence that, in all probability, I have been able to show you where the two men you are looking for may be found."

"That is true," replied Bertie, "and I shall call and see you to-morrow, at Carter's Creek. I will be disguised—I can't say how, or in what way, as that will depend upon circumstances."

"Will you bring the Tiger with you?"

"Not if I can shake him temporarily."

"I should think you would shake him altogether."

"He is not a very agreeable companion, but, for purposes of my own, I wish to have him under my observation."

"Watch him well and be on your guard continually. He might take it into his head to kill you."

"I am able to protect myself."

"But the Tiger has the strength of a Hercules; he is quick as lightning, a dead shot, and one of the most skilled manipulators of the bowie knife I have ever seen. If you——"

At that moment, with a snarl of rage, the Tiger

himself came rolling out from the dark bushes, sprang upright and started for Guardinas.

The Spaniard recoiled slightly as the terrible creature advanced toward him.

Quick as a flash Bertie sprang between them.

"Stand where you are!" he said, sternly.

"Out of my way!" was the rejoinder, in a voice that sounded like a muffled growl.

"Man or devil, whatever you are," returned Bertie, "if you attempt an attack upon this youth, Guardinas, you shall suffer for it!"

"Not at your hands."

"Yes, at mine!"

The Tiger of the Mesa gave vent to a snarling laugh and shook his huge body.

"Have a care, young bantam! You're only a mouse, and I'm a tiger! Don't tempt me to put you out of the way before the three days are up."

"Take no chances on my account, Diamond Dick, Jr.," broke in Guardinas, trying to force his way past Bertie.

The Spaniard had a long, keen poniard in his hand.

"Back!" said Bertie, sternly.

The youth wished to convince himself of the muscular prowess of the strange being whom Carlos Pitero had set to watch over him.

Springing forward, he launched out with his right fist and caught the Tiger in the shoulder.

It was a terrific blow, and would have knocked most men off their feet, for Bertie's muscles were like iron, and he knew how to put forth his strength to the best advantage.

But the blow had not a particle of effect on the Tiger. Sweeping his long, hairy arm in a circle in front of him, he tumbled Bertie to the ground and again started toward Guardinas, who had warily retreated a few steps.

It took Bertie but an instant to get up on his knees.

Drawing his revolvers with wonderful quickness he commanded the Tiger to halt.

"You may be the irresistible demon that everybody

says you are," remarked Bertie, calmly, "but with these revolvers I can reach a vital spot in your carcass, and it will not take much more urging on your part to make me do it."

"That man owes me his life," replied the Tiger, in a guttural voice.

"No man owes you his life," returned Bertie, sharply. "Like every one else, you come within the pale of the law, even out here in Arizona."

Diamond Dick, Jr., rose to his feet and turned to Guardinas.

"Mount your horse, Enrique," he added, "and ride off. I will hold this creature in leash until you are well away."

Guardinas was loth to leave his new-found friend in this way, but Bertie commanded him to go, and he finally went.

For five minutes after the Spaniard's departure the youth kept his gleaming revolvers on the man before him; then, backing toward his horse, he leaped into the saddle and rode rapidly on.

The Tiger, tireless and vengeful, followed him at a run.

CHAPTER III.

OUTWITTING THE TIGER.

It would have been easy for Diamond Dick, Jr., to free himself of the disagreeable and menacing presence of the Tiger of the Mesa.

That the youth did not do so was because he wished to have the man under his eyes as much as possible, and be able, in time, to fasten firmly upon him some crime for which he could be held answerable.

If Diamond Dick, Jr., allowed the Tiger to follow him to Carter's Creek, it was possible that he might give the alarm to Ganz and Hillner, and so defeat our hero's aims in this direction.

For this reason Bertie concluded to go to Carter's Creek alone, trusting circumstances to place in his hands a method for outwitting the Tiger.

After parting with Guardinas, Diamond Dick, Jr.,

did not ride many miles until he came within sight of a number of shadowy buildings, set on the left of the trail.

This was Parker's Rancho, a station that, at this time, was very much frequented by prospectors, cattlemen, and travelers of all descriptions.

Riding up to the door, Bertie pounded on the panels with the butt of his revolver.

A light soon appeared and Parker threw open the door.

"What's wanted, pilgrim?"

"Accommodations for the night."

"How many is they of ye?"

"Myself alone."

"Object ter sleepin' in the same room with somebody else?"

"No; if there are two beds in the room."

"Ye see, I'm expectin' a cowboy, an' I've promised to reserve a cot fer him. We're full chuck up, an' you git the last cot. Turn yer hoss inter the corral an' come in."

Bertie rode out to the corral, rubbed his horse down thoroughly, watered him, gave him a good feed, and then came back to the house.

Before passing through the door he looked around anxiously, but saw no trace of the Tiger.

Joe Parker, of Parker's Rancho, was a man of renown throughout that section of Arizona.

He hailed originally from Kentucky, stood over six feet in his socks, and was muscled like an ox.

As a fighter he was supposed to be invincible.

"Want a bite to eat?" he asked, as Diamond Dick, Jr., came in.

"No," said Bertie, "all I care for now is a place to sleep."

"Set down a minit while the ole woman fixes up the room. 'Tain't often we git lodgers in at this time o' night. Been over to Pitero's fandanger?"

"I came from that direction."

"While we're waitin' fer the room ter be fixed up, I'd like ter swap a few words with ye. Has that feller ever been done up yet?"

As he spoke he waved his hand toward the opposite wall.

Bertie glanced in the direction indicated and saw a *Police Gazette* picture of Jeffries tacked on the wall.

"No," he said; "he is still the champion."

"Not if I know it, he ain't. Looky yere! Gaze!"

Parker got up and turned slowly around so that Bertie could look him over.

"Don't ye think I could put up a purty good fight?"

"If muscle counts for anything you ought to be irresistible."

"Science, too! Blast it all, I'm chuck full of science. Say, I'm the champion of this country! It ain't Jeffries by a long shot! On the q. t., I'm tryin' ter pull off a match with that feller. I'm goin' ter write the *Gazette* an' put up ten thousand dollars. That's the kind of a duck I am! Why, I've licked everythin' in Arizony from the fightin' kangaroo to the Tiger of Tenderfoot Flat, an' I'm pinin' fer somebody that's my size."

"I guess Mr. Jeffries can fill the bill."

"Think he won't disapp'int me, do ye?"

"I think not."

Parker heaved a great sigh of relief.

"That's a load off my mind. I've been worryin' fer fear he wasu't all he was cracked up ter be."

Just then a woman stuck her head in at the door and beckoned to Parker.

He left the room, but came back in a few minutes and picked up the candle.

"It's all right," he said. "Come this way."

Parker led the way with a lighted candle.

Bertie followed him up a flight of stairs and into a large, low-ceiled room that contained two cots.

"Thar ye are," said Parker, setting down the candle, "an' if ye want ter git any sleep before sun-up ye'd better be at it, kase it's late."

Bertie locked the door, dropped down on the cot, and was sound asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow.

He was awakened by hearing Parker's voice, just outside the door.

"What you doin' here, you human conundrum? Git out of this or I'll throw ye through the window. Start yerself!"

This was the signal for the beginning of a thunderous racket in the hall.

It seemed for a moment as though the whole house was coming down.

Bertie sprang up and started for the door, but before he could reach it it was burst open, and the form of a man came tumbling head over heels across the threshold.

Then the racket ceased, the man lay silent and still in the middle of the floor, and Bertie made haste to light the candle.

"Wow!" exclaimed a voice.

Bertie looked around and saw Parker leaning against the side of the doorway.

He was rubbing his head and had a dazed, bewildered look on his face.

"That critter is a steam engine, an' his fists work like a brace of pile drivers."

"What critter? Who are you talking about?"

"Oh, that's so—ye don't understand. Well, as I brought the cowboy up to occupy that other cot we saw somethin' curled up outside this yere door that looked more like a human hyener than anythin' else. I invited the thing ter chase itself an' give it a kick. Well, arter that I hardly know what happened. I was knocked one way, and Yawcob, thar, was knocked the other, an'——"

"Py dunder! I was knocked clear into der middle of next veek, und it must haf been a cyclone vat did der pizness!"

Something in the cowboy's voice struck Bertie as being familiar, and he turned and looked at the man on the floor.

Yawcob had partially risen, and, although he had a bandage tied over one side of his face, Bertie recognized him at once.

"Yawcob, my boy, how are you?"

"Diamond Dick, Jr., oder I was a grazy Dutchman, by yiminy! How you was, anyhow?"

Yawcob was an old friend of Bertie's, and it is possible some of my readers may remember him.

"Oh," said Parker, "you fellers know each other, eh? While ye're talkin', I'll go gunnin' fer that critter that knocked me off my feet—which is somethin' that nobody else in these parts ever done afore."

Parker went away and, for several moments Bertie and Yawcob chatted over old times.

"What's the matter with your face, Yawcob?"

"Nodding now. I got scratched mit a palo cristi thorn vile drivin' dose cattle, aber it vas all right now." He pulled off the cloth as he spoke and threw it to one side. "I bed you I nefer got such a knock as I did about two meenits ago. Vat it vas, eh? It looked like von of dose—dose ring-i-tings—und, donner-wetter! how it shtruck out mit its two fists!"

"Did you ever hear of the Tiger of the Mesa, Yawcob?" asked Bertie.

"You bed my life! Vas dot id?"

"Yes."

"Den I'm glad I vas livin' already. V'y, dot Tiger can run yoost so fast as nefer vas, I tole you dot! I vas shased py him vonce, und, mein Gott in Himmel! my hair shtuck right oop so, und dot cold perspiration busted to my body all ofer und I t'ought, 'Yawcob, you vas deadt, sure.' Yah, dot's vat I t'ought."

"You ran onto the Tiger suddenly, did you?"

"Mein Gott, no! Run onto him? I runs away from him so fast like der tevil vas pehind me! I vas on a horse, doo, und he vas on his feets, aber he vas like a deer, he moved his legs so quick all der time."

"Was that the only time you ever saw him?"

"Yah, dot time und dis time vas all."

"And you got knocked out?"

"Dere vas no doubt aboutt dot."

Bertie smiled slightly.

"And Parker, too."

"Dot Tiger joost blayed ball mit Parker, yah, yah, yah! t'rowed him der floor all ofer und jammed him der ceilin' against, und der yall in und den sot down on him."

"The Tiger is pretty strong?"

"Stronger as den men—dot's der gosbel trut'."

"Have you heard anything about the Tiger?"

"He's der bugaboo vat vimmen shkares deir babies mit. 'Look out,' say dose vimmen; 'der comes der Tiger alretty—pe goot!' und dey vas goot. He vas a killer from dot town of Killersville. I bed you, I vant no druck mit him. He can go von vay und I vill go some oders, und pe habby."

Bertie had to laugh at the Dutchman in spite of himself. It was plain he had a wholesome horror of the Tiger of the Mesa.

"Id vas all righdt for you to laugh, but vait. Mebbly you won't laugh so much vone of dose days."

"It's a very serious matter, Yawcob."

"I bed you! But vat vas der Tiger doin' here?"

"Watching me."

"You? Dot vas some shokes, ain't id?"

"No, it is true," and Bertie thereupon told enough of his story so that Yawcob could understand his position. "I wish to do a little work in the morn-ing," went on Bertie, after finishing his explanation, "and I don't want the Tiger to follow me. With your aid I can get away from him for a few hours."

"Yust mention vat it vas, my poy, und I vas your huckleberry."

"All right—I'll tell you in the morning. Good-night, Yawcob. It's long after time to turn in."

Bertie dropped down on his cot once more, and Yawcob took a long and anxious look down the hall, and then closed and secured the door by shoving his cot in front of it.

Then he went to sleep with a revolver in each hand.

"If he comes back I'll make him some droubles, you bet my life," was the Dutchman's last thought, as he dozed off.

Bertie awoke at daylight.

Yawcob was snoring away like a steam engine, and had to be shaken long and hard before he opened his eyes.

"Git off my pack, git off my pack!" he cried, starting up to a sitting posture. "Ach, I vos havin'

von of dose nighdt horses und I t'ought I vas fightin' mit dot Tiger. Vat it vas, Diamond Dick, Jr.?"

"You remember that last night you said you would help me to shake the Tiger for a few hours this morning."

"Und so I vill. Vere is id?"

"What?"

"V'y, der Tiger."

"Look out there."

Bertie pointed through a window toward the corral. On the fence surrounding the enclosure sat the misshapen creature evidently waiting for the first appearance of Diamond Dick, Jr.

As they stood there looking, they heard voices below them, and shortly afterward Parker and his wife came into view.

Parker was headed for the corral, and his wife, a big, burly Norwegian woman, had hold of his coat tails.

"I tell ye," cried Parker, "I'm goin' ter give that 'ar chromo the wust lickin' he ever had in his life—I am so!"

"Parker," returned his wife, "you listen to me! That brute'll wipe up the yard with ye an' kill ye, to boot. I'm not pinin' to be a widder!"

"No, I reckon not; but I'm pinin' to polish off that plug-ugly. The idee of a feller who brags he kin lay over Jeffries knockin' under to a thing like that. Le' go, Christina! I'll buy ye a new caliker dress if ye will."

"Make it a dimity, Parker, an' I'll go ye!"

"Dimity it is!"

"But if that demon does ye up——"

"Dash it all, Christina! You'd have the hull ranch, then, an' one dimity dress wouldn't be a patchin' to what ye c'd git."

Gradually this filtered through Christina's head, and she dropped the coat tails.

As soon as he was released, Parker danced along toward the Tiger of the Mesa.

"Blast yer bloomin' pictur'," he cried, "if I don't swaller ye whole this time, I'll sw'ar I'll eat hay fer

a month, an' call myself a muel—I will so. Git off that fence or be knocked off!"

The Tiger was right in line for a fight. He made one jump, threw out his long, hairy arms and Parker was hurled backward, heels over head; then, had not Mrs. Parker come to the rescue with an ax, there is no telling to what an extent the strange creature would not have proceeded.

While Christina marched her husband off, the Tiger calmly climbed back on the fence.

"That was short and sweet," said Bertie, "and a fair knockout. Look at that queer creature! What terrible power is stored up in those arms!"

"Py dunder! he has a face on him like a poodle-dog," muttered Yawcob. "Vat am I to do, Bertie?"

"You are to change clothes with me."

"Hey?"

"I am going to get myself up to look as near like you as possible."

"I see," returned Yawcob, scratching his head, "und den der Tiger vill be after me instead of you, eh?"

"Yes. But you will be in no danger. All I want you to do is to stay here in this room for an hour or two after I leave."

"Und so I vill, und if der Dog-Face comes too glose, I lay him out so pooty quick he don't can tell vat shtruck him."

The two men then proceeded to exchange clothing.

Diamond Dick, Jr., drew on Yawcob's high-heeled boots, with their jingling Mexican spurs, donned his corduroy pantaloons and, over all, pulled the stiff leather "shaps," and buckled the belt about his waist.

His long hair he thrust up under the crown of the Dutchman's sombrero and topped off his disguise by wrapping a strip of white cloth about his face.

This cloth, together with the wide hatbrim, effectually concealed the youth's features.

"Now you vas a Dutchman for sure," said Yawcob, with a guffaw.

"Think I'll fill the bill?"

"You bed you."

"Is that white horse in the corral yours?"

"Yes."

"I'll borrow him. The black horse is mine; if you need a mount, use that one."

"I von't need any horses. I'll be here vor doo days unless you vant me to meet you some oder place."

"No; when I get through my work I'll come back here."

"Good! Take care of yourself, Diamond Dick, Jr., and don't let der Tiger eat you."

Bertie laughed as he left the room and descended the stairs.

When he reached the first floor he met Parker bathing his head at a washbasin.

"I say, Dutchy, that human conundrum is out thar, on the fence."

"Don't call me 'Dutchy,'" replied Bertie, lifting the cloth bandage and tipping Parker a wink.

"Diamond Dick, Jr., or I'm a Chinaman!" exclaimed Parker. "What are you in that rig for?"

"No time to explain. Keep mum and let Yawcob tell you."

Parker gazed in wonder as Diamond Dick, Jr., passed out of the door and on toward the corral directly under the sharp, glaring eyes of the Tiger.

Opening the gate of the corral, Bertie walked into the enclosure, saddled and bridled the white horse, got on the animal's back and galloped away.

The Tiger of the Mesa still sat on the fence gazing up at the window of the room which Bertie had occupied the night before.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIGHT ON THE SWINGING ROCK.

Everything was going smoothly at Carter's Creek. Fifteen or twenty men were busily at work.

The shouts of the foremen and the answering replies of the men mingled with the blows of hammers upon iron chisels, and the "choo, choo, choo," of the sputtering engine at the hoisting derrick.

It was quite an undertaking, the building of these stone abutments for the bridge across Carter's Creek.

Many of the stones going into the work were more than a yard square.

The abutment upon which the men were laboring was already some fifteen or twenty feet high.

On one side of it raged and swirled and eddied the fitful waters of Carter's Creek.

On the other side of the stream blasting was going on preparatory to rearing the second abutment.

The foreman from the other side had just rowed across in a skiff and had made his way to the spot where Guardinas, the superintendent, was standing.

"We need a few more cartridges," said he, "for another blast."

"Very well," replied Guardinas. "I will get them."

Making his way to the box where the explosives were kept, Guardinas unlocked it and took out half a dozen giant powder cartridges. With these he returned to the foreman.

"Five are enough," said the foreman.

"Very well."

The odd cartridge Guardinas dropped into his pocket, intending, at the first convenient opportunity, to return it to the box.

"Got room for another hand, boss?" asked a voice at Guardinas' elbow.

The superintendent looked around.

"You had better stick to punching steers," he answered, for the man who had spoken was evidently a cowboy. "We have all the men we need."

"You'll be shy a couple before night."

"How so?"

"The two who killed the freighter——"

"Diamond Dick, Jr., is that you?"

"Exactly, but do not pronounce that name quite so loud. Is that Hillner, at the engine?"

"Yes."

"Where is Ganz?"

"He is over there fastening the wire cable to the blocks of stone."

"I see him. Have you a man of nerve who you can trust to capture Hillner when I make the attempt to take Ganz?"

"Yes."

"Then post your man thoroughly. I'm going to have a look at Ganz, and will take him in, and turn him over to the sheriff after I settle one point."

"What is that, senor?"

"The sulphate of silver was on Robinson's right hand. I believe I can tell if the marks on Ganz's face were made by the fingers of a right or left hand. If by the former, I shall act without delay."

"Very well. I shall see that Hillner is taken care of."

"Thank you."

Bertie made his way over the piles of rock to the place where Ganz was making fast the wire cable to the stone blocks.

He was a little wiry man, nervous of action, and as quick as a cat in his movements.

Some distance behind Diamond Dick, Jr., was the end of a spur track, on which was standing a row of "flat" cars loaded with stone.

Under these cars, a baleful glare in his eyes and a long, wicked-looking knife between his teeth, crept the Tiger.

No one saw him.

Shortly after Diamond Dick, Jr., had left Parker's Ranch he had discovered the trick, and then, with the instinct of a bloodhound and the speed of a stag, he had taken up the trail of the white horse and had followed it.

The stone was attached to the cable by a patented device which made but one hole necessary—this in the center of the block.

As Bertie lounged forward and leaned against a pile of timbers, Ganz was just making ready to secure the cable.

As he bent down he gave Diamond Dick, Jr., a quick, suspicious glance.

The Tiger was still crawling steadily forward.

Only one man was at work anywhere near him.

This was a man who was facing up some stone in a cut at the side of the track.

His work placed him out of sight of the rest of the laborers, but where he was able to see, if he chanced

to look up from his work, the hairy form crawling along beneath the cars.

The Tiger kept his eyes as much on the mason as he did upon Diamond Dick, Jr., for he realized that the overturning of a stone, the snapping of a twig or any other slight noise would rouse the man's curiosity and lead to an alarm.

Although the Tiger writhed his way forward as noiselessly as a serpent might have crawled over the same path, and did nothing to attract the attention of the man in the cut, yet the mason happened to look up.

His eyes fell on the Tiger—their glances met.

The mason opened his lips to cry out, but the strange appearance of the creature had startled him, and the cry faded away upon his lips.

In an instant the Tiger had crawled out from between the car wheels and was bounding down the slope.

The mason realized his peril and started to run, dropping his heavy mallet and chisel on the stone upon which he was working.

The Tiger pursued him, catching up the mallet from the stone as he passed.

It did not take him long to come up with the mason, and one blow of the mallet sent the man, stunned and bleeding, to the earth.

It is difficult to understand why the Tiger did not use his knife in this emergency.

Once more he crawled back up the embankment and began creeping forward.

The struggle with the mason had been brief, much briefer than it takes to tell of it.

"Pretty hard work, isn't it?" asked Bertie of Ganz.

"It might be harder," replied Ganz, as he turned around so as to bring the other side of his face toward Bertie.

But he did not turn quick enough.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had seen the five black marks—his sharp eye being easily able to distinguish the thumb mark as well as the marks made by the other four digits.

Those stains had been left by some person's right hand.

Ganz suddenly raised up and lifted his arm above his head.

"Hoist away!" he shouted.

The broad, flat stone began moving slowly upward.

Bertie started toward Ganz, intending to make him a prisoner.

"Look out!" came a hoarse, warning shout from directly behind the youth.

Bertie turned and saw the Tiger bounding toward him.

He faced about to discover that Ganz had mounted the block of stone, and was being borne upward with it.

Diamond Dick, Jr., paused not an instant.

Rushing forward, he gave a terrific leap and landed on the stone directly beside Ganz.

The impetus of his leap set the stone to swinging, and when the Tiger reached the stone and sprang to catch it, it struck his head, momentarily stunning him; but he clung to it with his great, strong hands, and gradually began climbing upward.

As fate would have it, at this critical juncture, Guardinas was on the top of the abutment, overlooking the work of the masons.

As soon as he saw what was taking place he turned in the direction of the engine.

"Hillner!" he shouted; "lower away! lower away; man, I tell you!"

In front of Hillner, separating him from the abutment, was a pile of debris.

So far from heeding the command of the superintendent he dropped down behind this breastwork and allowed the stone to continue its upward journey.

Guardinas drew a revolver and muttered an imprecation when he found he could not use it upon Hillner.

"Grant," he yelled, "why don't you take that man as I told you to do?"

It was Grant who was to capture Hillner when Bertie made his hostile move toward Ganz.

"I can't," shouted Grant; "he is using his band-

aged hand to run the engine, and has me covered with a six-shooter!"

Guardinas swore, in a mild way, and turned toward the swinging stone.

A terrible sight met his eyes.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was having a fierce battle with Ganz.

It was a fight with knives, in midair, upon as insecure a foothold as could possibly be.

Creeping up from below, writhing like some huge snake over the sharp corner of the stone, was the Tiger of the Mesa!

In another moment Bertie would be at the mercy of two of his enemies.

Guardinas turned his revolver upon the ill-omened form of the Tiger.

Before he could fire, Hillner had caused the boom to swing around in such a manner that Guardinas was on that side of the swinging stone opposite the Tiger, with Diamond Dick, Jr., between the superintendent and his intended victim.

The boom swung around over the raging current of the creek.

This caused a slight jerk, which threw the Tiger farther down over the edge of the stone and almost flung Diamond Dick, Jr., from its top.

"Yield!" cried Bertie, quickly recovering himself and clutching Ganz by the wrist.

"Never!" was the grim reply, and then, by some peculiar accident, the fastening gave way and the stone, with those upon it, was dropped with a mighty splash into the waters of Carter's Creek.

A part of the hoisting tackle struck Diamond Dick, Jr., on the head, as he went down, and he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLAYING-CARD TRAIL.

When Diamond Dick, Jr., returned to his senses he found himself lying on the bank of the creek.

Several men were bending over him, among them being Grant, the man whom Guardinas had selected to make Hillner a prisoner.

"Do you feel better?" asked Grant, as Bertie opened his eyes.

"I'm all right," replied the youth.

"You had an ugly fall."

"Something hit me on the head as I went down."

"It was the heavy block, and it is a wonder it didn't kill you."

"Where is Guardinas?"

"After he pulled you out of the water he got on a horse and took after Ganz."

"So Guardinas pulled me out of the creek?"

"Yes."

"And Ganz got away?"

"Yes. While Guardinas was giving his attention to you, Ganz swam out, sprang on a horse and made off. Guardinas lost no time in putting out after him, and he said that when you came to yourself, if you felt well enough, you could follow."

"That would be a hard matter, I'm afraid."

"Guardinas had a pack of cards in his pocket, and he said he would drop them along the trail they took as a guide for you."

"He evidently has his head with him, as well as his nerve. How long has he been gone?"

"Not over ten minutes."

Bertie got up and felt of the bruise on his head. Although the blow had been a hard one, it was not a serious injury as his thick hair had protected his skull from its full effects.

"What became of the Tiger?" he asked.

"No one has seen him. From his position on the stone at the time it dropped from the cable, I am inclined to think that he is in the creek, and that the stone is on top of him."

"And Hillner—did he escape?"

"No," we have him."

"He's a desperate villain. Be sure that he does not give you the slip. Now, which way did Ganz and Guardinas go?"

"They took a bee-line down that little arroyo yonder."

Bertie had hitched his horse in a chaparral not far distant, and he was soon on the animal's back and

pushing rapidly along in the direction taken by Ganz and Guardinas.

The trail was not difficult to follow, as Guardinas had dropped the cards at frequent intervals, and Bertie's quick eye was not slow in finding them.

After passing through the arroyo the trail followed the creek for a short distance, and then broke abruptly away from it and struck into some rocky hills.

On leaving the hills it entered a patch of timber and then came out on a kind of rocky mesa.

As Bertie emerged from the timber he saw something that caused him to pull in his horse and proceed more cautiously.

Ahead of him, perhaps a hundred yards, he could see a man lying on the rocks.

As he approached closer, he discovered that this man was Ganz.

He was perfectly motionless, and was lying, sprawled out, on his back.

What could have happened? was the question that instantly sped through Bertie's mind. Had any harm befallen Guardinas? If not, why was he not within sight?

Bertie took in the surroundings with a quick eye.

There was nothing to excite his suspicions, and he spurred his horse forward, dismounting when within a few feet of Ganz.

As he reached the murderer's side and bent over him, he suddenly sprang up.

"Ah," cried Bertie, a revolver instantly finding its way into his hand, "playing 'possum, were you? Hands up!"

"Don't shoot!" cried Ganz, tossing up his arms; "you have got the drop on me, and I cave, of course."

"Where's Guardinas?"

"I don't know."

"Don't lie to me!" said Bertie, threateningly.

"I'm not lying to you."

"Didn't you know that Guardinas was following you?"

"No."

"Why were you lying on the rocks?"

"My horse threw me and ran away."

"I don't seem to be able to get you to tell the truth, and I might as well stop trying. You're my prisoner, Ganz."

"Why do you make me a prisoner?"

"I am going to turn you over to the sheriff to be tried for the murder of Hank Robinson, the freighter."

"I had nothing to do with that job."

"How did you get those marks on your face?"

"They're powder marks."

"There, you needn't say anything more. You —"

Just then a pair of hairy arms encircled Diamond Dick, Jr., from behind, and he was held as in a vise.

He struggled to free himself, but in vain.

He was in the grasp of that strange creature, the Tiger of the Mesa, whom Bertie had thought to be in the bottom of Carter's Creek.

Our hero realized, now, what wonderful strength the Tiger possessed.

Had he so willed, the Tiger could have flung the youth headforemost upon the rocks and dashed out his life.

That he did not do so was a surprise to Bertie.

"Ganz," cried the Tiger, with a hoarse chuckle, "our little trick worked to perfection. Bring a rope and we'll tie him. He squirms like an eel."

Ganz appeared with a rope without delay, and Bertie was bound while the Tiger held him.

This done, he was dropped on the rocks, a prisoner!

CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE GIANT POWDER.

"You didn't expect this, my little bantam, did you?" queried the Tiger, looking down at Bertie, with an ugly gleam in his eyes.

"I expected anything and everything at your hands."

"Then you will not be surprised at anything I may do."

"No."

"That's pleasant and saves a good deal of argu-

ment. The fact is, Diamond Dick, Jr., you know altogether too much for your own good."

"Too much for your good, too."

"Don't worry about us. We'll take care of ourselves. You're in my power now, and I could have crushed you a moment ago as though you had been an eggshell."

"You and Ganz and Hillner murdered that freighter," said Bertie, looking straight into the Tiger's little black eyes.

"So we did, and how you ever found it out is a conundrum to me."

"Well, I found it out, and it is not necessary for me to explain how."

Bertie had carried on his part in this conversation for the purpose of obtaining some expression of a guilty knowledge of the freighter's murder from the Tiger.

He had been more than successful in this respect.

"You see how it is, Ganz," said the Tiger, savagely. "He knows all about it."

"He does now, if he didn't before," returned Ganz, sourly.

"The proper thing to do is to silence him."

"And to make ourselves amenable for another murder, eh? You think nothing of killing people. If it hadn't been for you, Robinson wouldn't have been killed."

"Nevertheless, he was killed, and the only way we can save ourselves is by getting deeper in. Look ye! I was to follow Diamond Dick, Jr., and kill him in three days. I can do the job, stay in the woods for two days longer and then go back to old Pitero."

"You won't do anything of the kind while I'm able to prevent you."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Get out of the country."

"Diamond Dick, Jr., would have you nabbed before you fairly got started."

"What's the matter with leaving Diamond Dick, Jr., in the woods tied up, while we get out of the way?"

"The coyotes would get him."

"Perhaps."

"The thing to do is to put him out of the way now."

"I don't agree with you."

"Your old camp is in this vicinity somewhere, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm devilish hungry. Let's go to the camp, get a meal and decide after that what we will do with the prisoner."

"That suits me."

"Then lead the way. I'll bring him and come right behind you."

The Tiger stooped down and picked up Bertie as though he had been a child.

Ganz led off between the boulders with which the mesa was strewn and finally came to a ravine.

At one side of this ravine a ledge of rock projected several feet; beneath the ledge were signs of a habitation, and it was here that Ganz came to a halt.

The Tiger dropped Bertie just under the ledge and the youth looked about him curiously.

At one side, some distance away, was a small camp stove made of sheet iron; on a rocky shelf stood a coffee-pot and frying-pan, and against one of the walls hung a box with leather hinges.

"So this is the place where you and Hillner hung out while you were prospecting, eh?" queried the Tiger, looking about him.

"Yes."

"It's not bad. When I lived on the mesa I was satisfied with a hole in the ground. I didn't need a cook stove, then, for I ate my meat raw, and as for coffee—bah! I was a vampire—I drank blood. But all that is past now. Since I've lived with the Piteros I've learned to eat tortillas and chili con carne. I'm quite civilized, you see. What's on the bill of fare, Ganz?"

Ganz opened the box that hung against the wall.

"Bacon and coffee is all there is in the grub-box."

"Well, dish it up, dish it up. I'm hungry."

There were some pieces of wood by the stove, and Ganz put them in and lighted the fire.

In a few moments it was blazing brilliantly.

"That looks cheerful, at all events," said the Tiger, getting up and approaching closer to the stove.

At that particular moment, as Ganz had turned to the grub box to get out the bacon there came a tremendous explosion, and the air was filled with sand and debris.

As Bertie lay helplessly by, wondering what had happened, he heard some one call his name.

"Hello!" he returned, "who is it?"

"Guardinas," was the reply, as the Spaniard appeared through the smoky mist.

"Is this your work, Guardinas?"

"Yes. Your situation was desperate, and I was obliged to resort to desperate measures. I hope they are not killed."

"Who?"

"Ganz and the Tiger. I would not like to rob the law of its victims. But here—let me release you."

It took but a few moments to free Bertie of his bonds, and he finally stood up beside his friend, a free man once more.

By this time the smoke had cleared away and the dust had settled so that the interior of the camp could be clearly seen.

It was a queer sight that met the eyes of the two friends.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TALISMAN.

Close to the spot where the stove had been lay the Tiger, perfectly motionless.

A short distance away lay Ganz, where he had fallen upon his face with the piece of bacon, which he had just taken from the grub-box, in his hand.

"They are stunned by the explosion, that's all," said Guardinas, after giving the two unconscious men a hasty examination.

"What caused the explosion?"

"Giant-powder. I had thrust a cartridge in the stove. As soon as the fire reached it, of course it exploded."

"I followed up your playing-card trail," went on Bertie, "but I didn't find you."

"No, I found it necessary to make myself scarce for a while. When that stone fell into the river, I thought that it had been the death of the Tiger, but I found out very soon that it had not. While I was hurrying along in pursuit of Ganz, I thought I caught a glimpse of some one following me. At last I made sure of it and found that the man behind was the Tiger, who was chasing after me on foot, with the speed of a deer. Now, there was no doubt in my mind but that you were pegging along some distance behind the Tiger, but, as the Tiger was screening himself from observation as much as possible, I did not know but that you would come on without seeing him, and that he would do you an injury in some way.

"In order to prevent this, if possible, I broke off from the trail I was following, and made off in another direction, hoping the Tiger would follow me, but he didn't. When I crept back, shortly afterward, to reconnoitre, I found that you had been captured, and overheard something of the conversation that passed between the Tiger and Ganz. In their cold-blooded way, the two villains had decided to eat something before they concluded what they should do with you. For this purpose, the Tiger had suggested going to a camp, which, I took it, was somewhere near.

"Now, in breaking from Ganz's trail I had passed up a narrow ravine and gone directly past this place, so it at once struck me that this was the camp to which they intended to come. I hurried back here ahead of them, dropped that giant-powder cartridge in the stove and got out of sight."

"It was fortunate for me that you had that giant powder with you."

"I happened to have it only by the merest accident."

Bertie walked to the side of the Tiger.

"Do you not think his foot resembles that plaster model?" queried Diamond Dick, Jr.

"It is a perfect fac-simile," returned Guardinas.

"There is no doubt of the complicity of all three

of our suspects in the murder of Robinson. Hello! what's this?"

The Tiger's shirt was torn about the throat, and through the rent could be seen a small golden cross encircled by a hoop of the same metal.

Around the golden hoop was engraved an inscription in Spanish.

"I protect my owner from all harm," said Guardinas, translating the inscription. "Why," he added, "that is a talisman!"

Bertie caught his friend by the arm and whispered in his ear:

"Was it not a talisman that was stolen from Juan Pitero on the night he was murdered?"

Guardinas gave Bertie a strange look.

"Yes," he replied.

Bertie drew his knife, stooped down and cut the cord that secured the trinket about the Tiger's neck.

"I will take possession of this," said he.

Then he turned the unconscious Tiger upon his side and swept away the dark hair from the back of his neck.

The youth gave one look and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"What is it?" asked Guardinas.

"Nothing," returned Bertie, quietly.

"What's to be done now, senior?"

Bertie picked up the rope that Guardinas had removed from his wrists and ankles.

"We will secure Ganz and you may take him back to Carter's Creek to keep Hillner company."

"You will go with me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have some business to transact with our friend, the Tiger."

"Are you not going to tie him up?"

Bertie shook his head.

"From now on, senior," said Guardinas, warningly, "you must beware of the Tiger. He knows that you hold his life in your hands, and he will not hesitate to resort to desperate measures should opportunity present."

"The opportunity will not present itself," replied Bertie, as he stooped down and bound the rope about Ganz's wrists and ankles. "Bring your horse, Guardinas."

The Spaniard went up the ravine a short distance and soon returned, leading his horse by the bridle.

"The horse that Ganz rode must be somewhere near the place where I was set upon by the Tiger," said Bertie, "so we will throw the prisoner across your horse and you can pick up the other animal farther down."

"Very good," said Guardinas; "however, I dislike to leave you alone with that creature yonder——"

"Nonsense! It is your duty to go back with Ganz."

"But why not tie up the Tiger?"

"I prefer to leave him as he is."

"All right, senior; then I will go. Adios!"

"Good-by," said Bertie.

Guardinas disappeared down the ravine, and when Bertie turned once more in the Tiger's direction he found him sitting up with a vague, bewildered look in his eyes.

"Is that you, Ganz?"

"No; I am Diamond Dick, Jr."

"That can't be. Diamond Dick, Jr., was a prisoner, and you seem to be free enough. Where's Ganz, I asked you?"

"Ganz is a prisoner and has been sent back to Carter's Creek."

"Where's the Duke?"

This question startled Bertie.

Could it be possible that the explosion had, in any way unbalanced the Tiger's mind?

"What Duke?"

"The Duke of Hoboken, of course. He bossed the Sing Sing prison when I escaped."

"You lived in Sing Sing, then?"

"Lived there! Lived there? Why, that's where I die! Ha, ha, ha! I adopted murder for a profession, in that hole. I became a thug, a blood-sucker, a ghoul! It was there I metamorphosed myself into a beast. How many degrees higher than a brute is a man? Let him strip off the garments of civilization,

live in a burrow in the hillside, capture his game and eat it raw—he will quickly degenerate into a brute.”

Bertie listened to this incoherent harangue, and his wonderment grew upon him.

Could it be that this strange creature was rehearsing a portion of his past history?

“What crime did you commit that sent you to Sing Sing?”

“Murder! That first taste of blood whetted my appetite for human life.”

Suddenly pausing, he laid his hand upon his head; then, clutching his matted locks, he turned his blood-shot eyes upward.

“What’s this? I never felt this way before. What’s been done to me?”

He looked toward Diamond Dick, Jr.

“Where’s Ganz?” he asked again, and this time he seemed more rational.

“Ganz has been captured and taken away.”

“Captured, captured!”

For several minutes the Tiger sat on the ground, mumbling to himself.

“What was in the stove?” he asked, finally.

“Giant powder.”

“Who put it there?”

“Guardinas.”

“Oh, he had a hand in this, did he? I ought to have killed that fellow before. I’ll do it yet. As for you, Diamond Dick, Jr., I told you some time ago that you knew too much. Ganz is not around to prevent me from doing with you as I see fit. Look out for yourself.”

Clutching his long, wicked-looking knife in his right hand, the Tiger threw himself on his knees and began creeping toward Diamond Dick, Jr.

“Come another foot in this direction,” warned Bertie, sighting across the barrels of his .44’s, “and I fire!”

The Tiger laughed in his chuckling, brute-like way.

“I have a hide like an alligator,” he said; “it will turn your bullets as though they were mud-balls. If you do not believe what I say, shoot and see.”

Bertie’s forefingers were just flexing upon the triggers when the Tiger abruptly paused in his creeping advance and clutched at his neck; then with a wild yell he leaped to his feet.

“It’s gone,” he shouted, “gone!” and before Bertie could make a move he had darted away and vanished among the rocks.

CHAPTER VIII.

YAWCOB PLAYS A LONE HAND.

Yawcob was very much elated when he saw Diamond Dick, Jr., ride off right under the eyes of the Tiger without exciting a suspicion in the Tiger’s mind.

“You bed my life dot vas a mighty shleek pizness,” muttered the Dutchman, as he put on Bertie’s sombrero and looked out of the window for the fiftieth time. “Ya, ya, ya! Dot Diamond Dick, Jr., vas some great shakes, und don’t you forged it!”

Yawcob left the window again, sat down, laughed a little and then got up to have another lookout.

When he reached the window, what was his surprise to find the Tiger looking in at him, not two feet away.

The surprise depicted in the faces of the men was intense.

The Tiger had climbed up the adobe walls of the ranch building for a closer inspection of Diamond Dick, Jr.’s room.

Realizing that he was being tricked, he dropped down and made off at a run.

“Donnerwetter!” growled Yawcob; “der shig vas all oop, now!”

Kicking open the door, the Dutchman rushed downstairs and made for the corral.

It took him but a moment to throw his saddle on Diamond Dick, Jr.’s horse, and away he galloped in the direction taken by the Tiger.

But he might as well have tried to follow a bird as to follow any trail left by the Tiger—for no trail was left.

Yawcob proceeded by guess, and as he rode along, expecting every moment to come within sight of the Tiger, he was suddenly stopped by a couple of men, who sprang into the trail directly in front of his horse.

“Halt, senor!” cried one of the men, making a threatening gesture with his drawn revolver.

“Tousand tuyfels!” cried Yawcob. “Vat vas der madder mit you fellows, anyhow? Look oudt! I’ll run ofer you yust so sure as I vas a foot high!”

As the Dutchman showed fight, one of the men caught his bridle just as several more men filed out into the road from places of concealment among the bushes.

Yawcob was dumfounded.

"Vat haf I done, eh? You vant to hold me oop, is dot id?"

"No," returned one of the men who had just come out of the bushes, "we don't want to hold you up, Diamond Dick, Jr. We want you for something else. We are Carlos Pitero's men."

"Den you vas misdaken in der brand, my friends," replied Yawcob; "I am no more Diamond Dick, Jr., dan I am der Czar of Russia."

"That's Diamond Dick, Jr.'s horse," said one of the men.

"And I'd swear to those clothes anywhere," put in another.

"He's trying to fool us," said a third. "He's Diamond Dick, Jr., all right enough."

"I dell you dere vas some grand mishdakes," broke in Yawcob. "A suit of clothes und a horse don'd make me Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Perhaps not," returned the spokesman, "but they are sufficient to put a noose around your neck."

"Aber it ain'd enough to stretch der rope at der oder end of dot noose, py yeeminy!"

"We'll see about that. Carlos!"

"Si, senior."

"The riata!"

Quick as a flash a noose was cast about the Dutchman's neck and pulled taut.

Yawcob struggled to free himself of the encircling rope, but in vain.

One of the stalwart Mexicans leaped up on his horse behind him and pinioned his arms to his sides.

"Vell," panted Yawcob, "you fellers seem to hold der yoker und all der oder cards in der pack, and I t'row oop my hand. But look at dis—dose drie days vasn't oop, yet, efen if I vas Diamond Dick, Jr."

"We have an idea that you killed Juan Pitero, yourself."

"Now you vas makin' some muels of yourselves. V'y should Diamond Dick, Jr., kill Juan Pitero, or anybody else, eh?"

Nobody answered this question, and in the brief silence that followed, the hoofbeats of horses were heard along the road.

"It's Pitero coming!" said the spokesman.

The words were hardly uttered when two horsemen rode into sight, and gradually approached the little group in the trail.

They were Carlos Pitero and Romero.

"What are you doing?" cried Pitero, pulling up his horse.

"We have captured Diamond Dick, Jr."

"Where is he?"

"Here, on this horse."

Pitero laughed grimly.

"It is well we happened along just as we did. Otherwise you might have hung an innocent man."

"Isn't this the fellow?"

"No," replied Romero.

"Release him," said Pitero.

The stalwart Mexican who had been holding Yawcob in his arms sprang to the ground.

The Dutchman tossed the noose off his neck, and spurred his horse on along the trail.

When he arrived opposite Pitero he came to a stop.

"You vas goin' to get into more as a bushel of droubles," said he, "if you dry to treat Diamond Dick, Jr., as you vas goin' to treat me. He von't haf it, und more dan like as not he vill vipe you all out—so don't dake any shances."

Having thus delivered himself, Yawcob set off at a gallop.

As soon as he was out of sight of the Mexicans he stopped, drew a silver dollar from his pocket and held it between his thumb and forefinger.

"Vich vay I ought to go, I don't know," he muttered, "aber I bed you I don't vant any more glose shances like I had yust now. Here goes—heads I keep on und dails I go back."

The coin went spinning into the air and Yawcob caught it in his palm.

"Heads, py yiminy! Dot means keep on."

He put spurs to his horse, and continued along the dimly-defined trail.

While Yawcob's brain might have been a trifle dull concerning some things, he had an acute ear, and he had not gone far before he heard sounds ahead of him that caused him to pull up rather abruptly.

He was traveling through a patch of mesquite and palo-verde with a sprinkling of greasewood bushes.

Not a great distance ahead of him the trail made a sharp angle and Yawcob was in ignorance of what was taking place on the other side of the turn.

"Now," he muttered, "I vish I vas cross-eyed, so I could see around dot corner."

Riding off the trail, he dismounted, fastened the bridle-reins to a tree, and advanced cautiously on foot.

On reaching the bend in the trail, he carefully parted the bushes and peered through.

One glance sufficed him.

Springing up, he started back toward his horse at a run.

The riata was attached to the saddlebow.

He quickly unleashed it and retraced his steps toward the bend in the trail.

He did not return to the place where he had stood before, but advanced along the road.

Reaching the turn, he whirled the noose of the riata about his head and then let it fly.

CHAPTER IX.

HILLNER'S FINE WORK.

Hillner was a clever rogue, but he allowed himself and his partner to make a mistake by coming back to their work on the bridge wearing clothes that had been stolen from the dead freighter's load.

When Grant finally succeeded in capturing him at the time the block of stone fell into the river, he was securely bound hand and foot, and carried to the toolhouse; here a man with a Winchester rifle was set to watch him, for Grant did not propose to take any chances and allow his man to get away. No sooner was Hillner landed in the toolhouse than his active mind began to cast about for some means of escaping.

The toolhouse was small, probably six feet by ten, and was filled with hammers, chisels, picks, shovels, trowels, and everything else that was of service on the work.

Hillner lay close to one of the frame walls. Near him was a mason's trowel, and his thoughts at once centered upon that sharp-edged, diamond-shaped tool. It should give him his freedom.

Hillner's guard sat close to the door upon an upturned keg.

He held his rifle across his knees, and studiously refrained from holding any conversation whatever with the prisoner.

He glanced toward Hillner occasionally, but that was all.

An hour or two of this kind of work made the guard a little weary.

He wanted some way to pass the time, and drew a voluminous letter from his pocket and began reading it.

This was Hillner's opportunity.

He managed to work the trowel under him, with his arms, and to slip it into a crack so that a portion of the sharp edge remained above the floor.

Then, closely watching the guard, he began sawing his bonds in two on the trowel. It was a difficult task, but Hillner was a wiry fellow, and managed it so that the movement of his arms was scarcely perceptible.

The guard's letter must have been from his sweetheart, for it was very interesting, and he was entirely oblivious of his surroundings while reading it.

The first intimation he had that anything was wrong was a stunning blow on the side of the head delivered by Hillner's fist.

The guard sprang up and tried to defend himself, in a bewildered way; seeing that he was not succeeding very well in his attempts to ward off the blows of his former prisoner, he sought to cry out, but Hillner's bony fingers crept about his neck and compressed his windpipe so that he could not utter a sound.

Then, quickly and deftly, the guard was choked into insensibility, and Hillner bound and gagged him securely, took his Winchester, and crept away.

The toolhouse was some distance away from the scene of operations on the bridge, and the murderer had little difficulty in getting away unseen.

He could think of but one haven of refuge at this critical hour, and that was the secluded camp which he and Ganz had occupied for so long while working as prospectors.

He started in the direction of this camp at the top of his speed, for he knew it would be only a very short time until his escape was discovered, and men sent in pursuit of him.

"If I once reach the camp," muttered Hillner, "they won't be able to find me, but if they do, I can either fight 'em off or else die with my boots on."

Hillner continued sprinting along the trail until he was tired out; then he sat down to rest for a few moments just behind the bend in the road toward which Yawcob, fresh from his little difficulty with the Piteros, was already hastening.

Hillner had not been seated for more than five minutes when he happened to glance down the trail.

After one look he lost no time in crawling behind the greasewood bushes at his back.

What he had seen was Guardinas, riding toward him and leading a horse across whose back lay Ganz, a helpless prisoner.

"It's about time I showed up," thought Hillner,

grimly. "If I do a little fine work now, I can get Ganz out of that fellow's clutches."

Hillner waited quietly in the brush until Guardinas rode past; he then stepped noiselessly into the road and attempted to lift Ganz from the horse.

His design was a daring one.

Had he succeeded in it, Guardinas might have ridden for some distance without suspecting that his prisoner was anywhere else than on the led horse.

But Ganz was tied to the horse, and as Hillner had no knife, he was compelled to forego his purpose.

In order to work unhampered, he had stood his rifle against a tree beside the trail.

Thinking he heard a sound of labored breathing behind him, Guardinas turned hastily in his saddle.

Seeing his danger, Hillner cleared the distance that separated him from his gun at a bound.

Crack, crack, crack!

Guardinas' ready revolver was in his hand in a jiffy, and three bullets pierced the murderer's clothing, but left him unscathed.

"Carraca!" growled the Spaniard; "only one revolver, and three shots wasted."

Meantime Hillner had lost not a moment in placing himself behind a tree.

From this point of vantage, he could threaten Guardinas with his Winchester, and run very little risk himself.

"Come out, Hillner!" cried Guardinas. "You see, I know you, and it is impossible for you to hide from me."

"I am not hiding from you. I got behind this tree simply to get out of range of your confounded bullets."

"You might as well come out and give yourself up."

"Never!"

"I know you had a hand in the murder of Robinson, the freighter, and are just as guilty as Ganz here."

"And you tell me this, and then expect that I will come out and give myself up!"

"Certainly."

"The murder of that freighter is a job that somebody will swing for."

"Exactly."

"Well, I'd rather be shot than hanged, any day."

"Take your choice."

"Look here, Guardinas! You act as though you

held the drop on this situation, but you're mistaken. I've got a Winchester here, and——"

Crack, crack, crack!

Just then Hillner injudiciously exposed a portion of his body, and the wary Guardinas fired his last three shots.

The murderer received a stinging wound in the wrist, that made him almost furious.

"I had no wish to deal harshly with you, Guardinas, but you have forced me to. Ride on down the road and leave Ganz where he is."

"Not much."

"Ride on down the road, I tell you, or I will drop you out of your saddle."

"Then do your dropping! When I ride off down the road Ganz goes with me."

"It's none of my business if you make a fool of yourself. If you're not around that bend in the trail by the time I count three I shall fire!"

Guardinas made no answer, and Hillner began to count.

"One! two! This is your last chance, Guardinas! Th——"

At that juncture, the noose of Yawcob's riata came swirling through the air, and settled about Hillner's shoulders.

A second later, and the murderer was lying on his back on the ground.

Yawcob lost no time in rushing forward and dropping down with his knee on the fellow's breast.

CHAPTER X.

THE TABLES TURNED AND RETURNED.

"Who are you?" asked Guardinas.

"I'm a Dutchman, und my name vas Yawcob. Who you vas yourself?"

"My name is Guardinas——"

"Py dunder! How many dimes ve do dings ven ve don'd know vat ve're doing already. Dot vas my fix yust now."

"I don't understand you."

"V'y, it vas just so blain as mud. You vas Guardinas, hey?"

"Yes."

"Vell, I vas Yawcob—see? Und dere you vas! Gif me some rope und I vill die dis man oop pooty quick."

Hillner was quickly bound and dragged out into the trail.

"If I am not mistaken," remarked Guardinas, "you are wearing Diamond Dick, Jr.'s clothes."

"So I vas; und I vant to dell you von ding—döse clothes vas a hoodoo. Ven you get into dose clothes you get into more as a bushel of droubles—yah, dot is so, you bed my life."

"You are acquainted with Diamond Dick, Jr.?"

"Vell, I should shmile dot I vas. He told me 'pout you, und I reckon if I hadn't got here ven I did, I might yust as vell not have come, eh?"

"That man wouldn't have dared to kill me!"

"He looked like pizness, anyhow. Vat I vas goin' to say, vas dis—haf you seen Diamond Dick, Jr., lately?"

"I left him about an hour ago."

"Vas he alone?"

"No; the Tiger was with him."

"Donnerwetter! Vouldn't I like——"

Yawcob didn't finish that sentence.

He was interrupted by a demoniacal howl, simultaneously with which the Tiger of the Mesa leaped out into the trail, whirling a club about his head.

"Look out!" shouted Guardinas.

Yawcob attempted to draw a revolver, but the club descended on his head, and he dropped like a log to the ground.

At that instant Diamond Dick, Jr., tore around the bend in the trail, his horse at full speed.

The youth took in the situation at a glance, and pulled in his panting steed just as the Tiger started for Guardinas.

"There is not a cartridge left in my revolver, Diamond Dick, Jr.," said Guardinas, quietly.

Bertie dropped his bridle reins and was on the point of drawing his weapons when the Tiger threw his club straight at him.

The youth was almost unseated.

Before he could recover himself the Tiger had drawn his long knife and was rushing toward Yawcob.

The Dutchman had recovered his senses.

He was sitting on the ground, and when he saw the Tiger advancing toward him with murder glittering in his little black eyes, he drew his revolver and fired.

The Tiger staggered.

Again Yawcob fired, and this time the Tiger threw up his hands and fell on his face in the trail.

"Dot's vat I call shootin' in self-defense," said Yawcob, dropping his revolver and rubbing his head.

"You did exactly right, Yawcob," said Bertie, dismounting and examining the Tiger. "This creature was a bloodthirsty wretch and deserved death."

"Is he really dead?" queried Hillner.

"Yes."

"Tell me, has he a circle of gold about his neck, with a cross in the center of it?"

"Is this what you mean?" asked Bertie, drawing the talisman from his pocket.

"I guess so—I never saw it. After the Tiger killed Robinson he swore he would get a talisman that would save him from the responsibility of the crime. He said that no one would be able to harm him while he wore it."

Bertie smiled contemptuously.

"Did he say where he intended to get his talisman?"

"No."

Dropping the talisman into his pocket, Bertie turned to the Dutchman.

"How came you here, Yawcob?"

Yawcob explained, with now and then a word from Guardinas.

"So Hillner must have given your man Grant the slip, Guardinas," said Bertie, turning to the Spaniard.

"It looks like it. But how did you happen to get here as you did?"

"Shortly after you left me in the ravine the Tiger was preparing to attack me, but suddenly discovering that his talisman was gone, he sprang up and darted away. I thought he might follow you and make you some trouble, so I secured my horse as quickly as I could, and started after him. That's all there is to tell. You know the rest."

Bertie stopped abruptly, and bent his head.

"What's the matter?" asked Guardinas.

"There's a party of men coming this way. I can hear the hoofbeats of their horses as well as the sound of their voices."

"So can I! Who are they?"

"That's a conundrum which it would be pretty hard to answer, at this particular moment."

"Py yiminy, I know! It vas der Piteros—dey're comin' dis vay; shkin oudt, poys, shkin oudt!"

Yawcob started down the road to secure his horse. As he reached the bend in the trail he halted, turned around and ran back.

"What's the matter?" queried Bertie.

"It's der Piteros, dot's vat's der madder."

"They will hurt nobody."

"Don't you fool yourself! Dey're after you, already. Git oudt, I dell you! Shkip so quick as nefer vas!"

"Too late, Yawcob. Here they are!"

At that instant the Piteros dashed around the bend.

As soon as they saw the little party in the trail ahead of them, they gave vent to a loud yell.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Bertie, Yawcob, and Guardinas stood side by side in the center of the trail.

The two former held revolvers in their hands, and Guardinas had possessed himself of the Winchester carried by Hillner.

Although small in numbers, they presented a formidable appearance, and Pitero and his followers brought their horses to a stand.

For a moment deep silence settled over the two opposing forces.

Old Carlos Pitero was taking note of the situation.

Two prisoners whom he did not know, and the Tiger, wounded or dead!

"Diamond Dick, Jr.," spoke up Pitero, "what about that wager of yours?"

"The three days are not up."

"You couldn't do the work you have laid out for yourself in thirty days—or thirty years, for that matter."

"I beg your pardon, senor. I have accomplished it already."

An incredulous laugh went up from the Piteros.

"Diamond Dick, Jr.," said Pitero, stopping the commotion in his ranks with a gesture of the hand, "since the fandango grave doubts concerning your good intentions have suggested themselves to us."

As he spoke Pitero kept a wary, expectant eye on the motionless figure of the Tiger.

"There is no doubt at all of my good intentions," returned Diamond Dick, Jr. "What object would I have in mixing myself up in this matter except to save an innocent man from death?"

"On the night my son was murdered I asked you a question and you did not answer it."

"Then it was an oversight on my part. Why did you not ask the question a second time?"

"The exciting nature of the events must be my

excuse. Since the fandango I have had an opportunity to think the matter over."

"What was the question?" asked Bertie, impatiently.

"I asked you why you had come to the fandango without having been invited."

"And I did not answer?"

"You did not."

"Well, I will answer it now. Understanding that the Tiger of the Mesa lived at your ranch I went there to see him. It happened that the fandango was on at the time I arrived. I went into the house with the intention of announcing myself to you and proclaiming my mission. Before I could do so, the tragedy had taken place."

"Romero!" called out Pitero.

Romero rode to the old man's side, and for some time they talked together in low tones.

At last Pitero turned toward Diamond Dick, Jr.

"We have come to the conclusion," said he, "that we can't accept your statement."

"What motive would I have in making a misstatement?"

"To shield yourself. We think it possible that you, yourself, murdered Juan."

At this remark Bertie could not refrain from giving vent to a low laugh.

"What would my motive be?" he asked.

"We didn't look for any motive," returned old Carlos, very much angered by Bertie's laughter; "we simply take the evidence as it stands."

"The evidence against me," broke in Guardinas, "is stronger than it is against him."

"You will meet your deserts in due time," growled Pitero.

"I can set this matter at rest without a moment's delay," said Bertie; "the man that murdered your son, Pitero, lies there!"

Bertie pointed toward the prostrate form of the Tiger.

"What! The Tiger of the Mesa?"

"Yes."

"Is he dead?"

"He is."

"Who killed him?"

"Py yiminy, I did," spoke up Yawcob, "und don't you forget dot, eider."

A fierce, resolute look came into the faces of all the Mexicans.

"The Tiger was killed—shot by Yawcob here, in self-defense."

"And now you lay upon him the murder of my son."

"I do!"

"Can you prove what you say?"

"Certainly."

Diamond Dick, Jr., took from his pocket the gold talisman.

At sight of it an involuntary exclamation dropped from old Pitero's lips.

"My son's talisman! Where did you get it?"

"From the Tiger. It was tied about his neck. If I am not mistaken, you missed it from your son's body but a few moments after he was murdered."

"I will trouble you for that, senor."

"I have no right to keep it from you."

Bertie tossed the trinket to Romero, who deftly caught it, and handed it to Pitero.

"You have other proofs?" queried the latter.

"Yes."

Advancing to the 'Tigers' side, Bertie threw the matted hair from his neck.

At this place the thick hair had protected the skin from sunburn, and it was not so dark as that of the rest of his body.

On the back of the neck was a V-shaped scar.

"You will remember," went on Bertie, "that on the night of the tragedy I called your attention to Juan Pitero's deformed finger and the talon-like nail which had dug from the body of this murderer, whoever he was, a small piece of dark skin. You may draw your own conclusions."

Bertie stepped back to the side of his friends, and once more Romero and Pitero held a whispered consultation.

This was longer and more animated than the first, but they succeeded in reaching about as sensible a conclusion as they did in the former instance.

"We can't accept your proof, Diamond Dick, Jr.," said old Carlos. "We do not consider the evidence conclusive."

"Then there is no use arguing the matter with you," replied Bertie, warmly; "no matter how much proof I gave, you would still believe as you wished to."

"We would still believe that you murdered Juan."

"The folly of such reasoning is evident on the face of it."

"Nevertheless, I demand that you surrender yourself into our hands."

"Never!" shouted Guardinas; "we will die first!"

"You bed my life!" echoed Yawcob. "You try to take Diamond Dick, Jr., and you make yourselves some mighty bad droubles."

"What would you do with me if I surrendered?" asked Bertie.

"We'd give you a trial," replied Pitero.

"Before whom?"

"Before myself and Romero."

"Are you qualified to act as a judge?"

"I'm a justice of the peace, senor."

"You must know that justices of the peace have no power to try criminal cases."

"I will take the law into my own hands."

"Yes," sneered Bertie, "that has been your usual practice in the past. Had I not interfered at the fandango, you would have taken the law into your own hands and killed Senor Guardinas. Such people as you do more to retard and block the progress of frontier territories than all other forces combined. You are a menace to civilization, and the Government should send its troops to drive you out of the country. Sooner than surrender myself into the hands of such people, I will fight to the bitter end."

Pitero's friends were overcome with awe.

They had never heard old Carlos addressed in this manner before, and they wondered what would be the outcome.

Pitero was in a towering rage.

His face was pale and his eyes flashed as he cried out to his men:

"Yonder stands the man who may have murdered Juan, the man who killed the Tiger, and Enrique Guardinas! They defy us! Let's give them a taste of the Pitero way of doing business! On to them!"

Old Carlos was a fanatic.

None of the followers of St. Theresa was worse than he.

He had no law but his own, and cared not a wisp for a human life if that life stood in his way.

His followers were more or less imbued with his fanaticism, and, reckless of consequences, they charged down upon the dauntless three.

"Don't shoot to kill," cautioned Bertie, in a low tone. "They will not be mad enough to attempt to do anything but capture us."

The onrushing Mexicans discharged a volley, and

Bertie and his friends returned it—all with no casualties on either side.

When they came close enough, the Mexicans threw themselves from their horses and brought the fight to close quarters.

Old Carlos and Romero made for Bertie.

Carlos was in the lead.

"You infernal Americano!" he shouted; "we have you now. Will you surrender? Will you——"

Pitero had struck at Bertie's face with his clinched fist.

In a twinkling the youth parried the blow and deftly tripped Pitero backward over his extended foot.

"You can treat him that way because he is an old man," hissed Romero, "but I'll show you a trick worth two of that."

"Because he was an old man," returned Bertie, "I let him off easily. As for you, look out for yourself."

Romero launched out with a blow straight from the shoulder.

Had it fallen as he had intended it should fall, Diamond Dick, Jr., would have gone down like a steer under the butcher's hammer.

Bertie, however, dropped on his knee, and the Mexican's fist passed over his head.

Romero had put so much force into the blow that he was thrown violently forward.

Springing up quickly, Bertie caught him under the chin with a knockout blow.

Romero was doubled up and hurled backward off his feet.

For a brief space he lay where he had fallen, and Bertie had time to help Yawcob out of a bad scrape with a couple of antagonists, and to return in time to meet Romero, once more.

"How goes it, Guardinas?" cried Bertie.

"Two down!"

"Good; so have I!"

"I haf von oop," yelled Yawcob, "und dot's me!"

At least seven Mexicans had gone into the fight, and there were now not more than four more to be dealt with.

Had Pitero and his friends used their weapons there is no doubt what the outcome of such an uneven battle would have been; but your average Mexican is a poor man with his fists, and Pitero's men proved no exception.

"One more try at you!" gritted Romero, rushing toward Bertie.

Bertie's quick eye took in the revolver which he held in his hand; the weapon was clutched by the barrel, and Romero was doubtless intending to use the stock upon our hero's head.

"Ah! that's your game, is it?" muttered the youth, drawing one of his own revolvers and clutching it in a like manner.

Romero essayed to catch Diamond Dick, Jr., about the waist.

The latter understood his purpose, and waited until he had come quite close, then leaped high into the air and gave the hand that held the revolver a terrific kick.

The revolver dropped from Romero's grasp.

Again alighting on his feet, Bertie followed up his temporary advantage with such a blow from the clubbed weapon in his hand that the Mexican was tumbled in the trail, completely knocked out.

"The fight is ours," cried Bertie, exultantly, and hardly had the words left his lips when a party of horsemen came into sight around the bend in the trail.

They were Grant and a number of picked men from the bridge, half a dozen, all told.

Yawcob had seated himself on a rock and was filling a pipe preparatory to taking a bit of comfort after his hard struggle.

Guardinas was looking after the safety of the prisoners, and Bertie was waiting for Grant and his men.

"What's the matter here?" asked Grant.

"Der madder vas come und gone ag'in," replied Yawcob. "Ve're vaitin' for more Greasers."

"We've had a bit of a scrimmage," said Bertie, "but its' all over with now."

"Thunderation! this looks like a battlefield."

Guardinas now came forward.

"How did Hillner manage to escape from you, Grant?" asked the Spaniard.

"That's something that nobody seems to know."

"You had him properly guarded?"

"Yes; we put him in the toolhouse and I set Gormley to watch him."

"Gormley's a good man. Was he armed?"

"He had a Winchester."

"What does Gormley have to say?"

"Nothing; but the last thing he remembers was reading a letter. When he came to himself he found that he was tied and gagged, and that Hillner was gone. Just as soon as we discovered the prisoner's escape I picked up all the available horses we could

find and started in pursuit. I see you have Hillner over there?"

"Yes; he came along this road, and tried to do a little fine work and got captured for his pains."

"You have Ganz, too?"

"Yes; and the Tiger. Have two of your men take the prisoners up in front of them on their horses."

"What's to be done with the Tiger?"

"I want him, senior."

It was old Carlos who voiced the words, and he was very meek and humble.

"I am glad to see," replied Bertie, "that you have been thrashed into a better spirit. But you are not through with me yet. You said a short time ago that you thought I had murdered your son, Juan. Was that a lie or not?"

Bertie looked the old man squarely in the eyes.

"It—it—was a lie."

"I thought so. Now, before all these people, tell me who it was that really killed your son?"

"The Tiger of the Mesa."

"And Enrique Guardinas had nothing to do with it?"

"Nothing at all."

"Now, then, have I, or have I not, won my bet?"

"You have won."

"Very well—that's all I want of you. Take your people and get out of here—quick!"

Old Carlos was thoroughly subdued, and he and his people lost no time in starting down the trail.

They carried the dead body of the Tiger with them.

Guardinas suddenly whirled about and caught Bertie by the hand.

"I shall never forget what you have done for me, amigo, mio."

"Tush! It was only what one man, with any sand at all, would have done for another."

That night Bertie and Yawcob parted with Guardinas, and rode into Tucson and turned their two prisoners over to the sheriff of Pima County.

Of that strange creature, known as the Tiger of the Mesa, a true account of whose taking off I have

endeavored to give in this brief chronicle, stories are still extant in southern Arizona and northern Mexico.

What his real name was and where he originally came from are mysteries that will never be solved.

His partners in crime, Ganz and Hillner, were duly tried for the murder of Robinson, the freighter.

Through evidence which Diamond Dick, Jr., was able to put into the prosecuting attorney's hands, their guilt was clearly proved, but as it developed that the Tiger had done the killing, the other two being concerned in the robbery merely, they were sent to Yuma for a long term, and did not receive the extreme penalty of the law.

A few weeks after he left Tucson, Diamond Dick, Jr., heard that Juan Pitero's widow, with all the inconsistency that distinguishes her sex, had quietly fled from the Piteros and placed her life and happiness in the hands of Enrique Guardinas.

"Yawcob," said Bertie, as they stood in the depot waiting for the train that was, as our hero thought, to take him out of Arizona, "how about that little Dutch girl you told me about when I saw you last?"

"She vas Mrs. Yawcob alretty, und she shtays py Maricopa vile I drive shteers und make money vor dot leetle home ve vas goin' to buy von of dose days, eh?"

Bertie shook the Dutchman's hand.

"You're a nervy fellow, Yawcob, and I hope you will have all the success that you deserve. I trust we shall meet again."

"Me, too, you bed you. Goot-pye, Bertie."

And so they separated, Yawcob to go back to his cattle driving on the mesas and Bertie to continue his adventurous wanderings.

THE END.

Next week's issue (No. 300) will contain "Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Daring Drift; or, Under Water Through Devil's Gulch." That drift was as brave a deed as the young hero was ever called upon to perform. How brave it was you cannot appreciate unless you read all about it in the thrilling story to be printed next week.



"Whoopie! Clar ther road! Look out in front thar! It's a comin' like a cyclone!"

"What's a comin'?"

"Ther new contest, of course. Wake up, ye varmint, and sound yer rattles fer a close contest."

So spoke Handsome Harry the other day. The old Serpent was pretty near right, too, wasn't he? Look on page 31, if you don't know what a dandy prize you have a chance for.

The Capture of Red Mike, the Bank Burglar.

(By Harry Aldrich, Ill.)

I had bought a new automobile and I did not know how to run it. It was the first automobile owned in Richmond, Illinois. A man in the crowd volunteered to show me how to do it. He ran the automobile around in a circle a few times, and suddenly a man out of the crowd yelled that the man in the automobile was Red Mike the bank burglar. He started the automobile south. The detective found a horse already saddled, and he jumped on and chased the automobile. The detective was gaining slowly on him. The detective shouted for him to halt. But he would not. Red Mike talked kindly to me. We had just reached a stretch of timber when Red Mike made ready to jump.

Just as he jumped I stuck my foot out and tripped and then jumped on him and pinned him to the ground. I couldn't have held him much longer, but the detective came and put handcuffs on him. We rode back to town. I found that after watching Red Mike run the automobile I knew how myself. Red Mike was turned over to officers and sentenced to twenty years in Joliet. There was a reward of \$5,000 for the capture of Red Mike, I taking half and the detective the other. I was quite a hero for a long time.

A Fight With a Tramp.

(By Ed Snell, Colo.)

One day in July, 1901, I went out hunting with my dog Frisky. I had a new breech-loading shotgun and an old horse pistol.

As I was crawling under a fence to get into a field, I heard a voice call to me to stop from the road behind me.

Looking back into the road, I saw an ugly and dirty-looking tramp looking at me.

"What do you want?" I said, noting that he was not very big if it came to a fight.

"That gun and pistol of yours," he said, coolly.

I turned and ran for the creek which was not very far away, and Frisky gave a bark and followed me. My

father was working by the creek, and I ran for him as fast as I could go, forgetting that I had a gun and pistol with me. The tramp started after me and soon caught up to me. He grasped me by the collar and said:

"Hold on, young fellow," and threw me on the ground. I have been learning to box for some time and I am also a good wrestler.

I turned over under him, and with my pocket-knife in my fist I struck him on the forehead and dazed him. I called to my father as loud as I could and then crawled out from under the tramp who seized me and we began to fight. I struck him with my fist, with my pocket-knife in it several times. Then I saw my father coming and called to him.

The tramp pulled my pistol from my belt, and hit me with the butt end, and I was knocked senseless. When I came to my senses again I saw the tramp lying on the ground with his hands tied together with his suspenders, which were made of rope. I was in bed for a week, and the tramp was taken to jail. I think it was a pretty exciting time, don't you?

When the Guard Slept.

(By Henry P. Farley, Texas.)

In the spring of 1773, just as the last rays of the setting sun were gilding the loftiest peaks of Laurel Ridge—a range of mountains in the northwest portion of what is now known as the State of Virginia—a party of wayfarers halted on the summit of one of the lower hills of the chain and immediately set about preparations for encamping for the night.

The party alluded to numbered ten persons, counting great and small, black and white. The leading personage of this number was a large, stoutly-built man, about thirty-five years of age, with rather strongly marked features, characterized by a frank, manly, honest expression.

He was accompanied by his wife, three children, his wife's sister and four negro servants. Besides the individuals mentioned, there were ten horses, on five of which, when the party came to a halt, were mounted the

wife, her sister, the three children, and two female servants of the negro race. The other horses were loaded with provisions and such articles as were indispensable to a family about to settle in a new country.

The fire was soon made, and supper soon got under way. After eating supper, the party being tired they soon retired to rest—all but one of the male negroes whose duty was to sit up and guard against Indians half the night, then the other sat up the rest. But along about ten o'clock, being sleepy, he slept. About twelve o'clock Indians could be seen creeping along toward the camp—as they came up behind the guard who was asleep, one of them brained him with his tomahawk, but as his body fell it woke up the man's wife, who quickly woke her husband and woke up the other negro. They got their rifles and raised the tent flap easily and looked out.

They fired at the Indians and shot three of them. The two men bounded out on the remaining Indians and killed them with the butts of the heavy rifles and both stood guard the balance of the night.

No more Indians appeared, so they buried the black the next morning, glad that it was no worse, and moved on their way.

How I Caught a Thief.

(By Albert Schien, Georgia.)

One Saturday night, as I was walking up the street I noticed a large crowd of people, mostly negroes, running up the street and yelling as loud as they could. I ran up and mingled with the crowd. It did not take me long to find out what the trouble was. A raggedly-dressed negro boy about sixteen or seventeen years old had stolen a watch from a jewelry store, and one of the clerks was at the head of the crowd, about four feet behind the fugitive, yelling:

"Stop thief!" with all his might. A few policemen had joined in the chase, but could not keep up with the crowd.

Just then something happened. The negro suddenly wheeled around and with an upraised knife jumped on the clerk, who was right at his heels, and cut a long gash across his left cheek. With a groan, the unfortunate clerk dropped face downward upon the sidewalk.

All this had happened in an instant. The clerk was carried to a drug store, and the crowd, which had kept increasing, started after the negro.

The hundreds of people were running around yelling more like a band of escaped lunatics. Just then two policemen, who were walking down the street, saw the negro running toward them, and hearing the people yelling, "Stop thief!" and, "Kill the nigger!" they both pulled out their clubs and getting directly in front of the negro, one of the policemen dealt the negro a blow across his head, and he fell to the ground with a groan.

But while the people were rushing up to see the negro they were astonished to see him jump up and rush into a nearby restaurant. Immediately the place was surrounded; about a dozen policemen entered the place, while two remained outside to keep the crowd from rushing in. I was now standing a little back from the crowd, when I heard a slight noise above my head, and looking up I beheld the negro raising a window about twelve feet from the ground. Looking down a moment to see if

he was watched, he let himself out of the window and jumped to the ground. I had a long, heavy stick with me and as the negro got up to run, I pushed the stick between his legs and he fell to the ground. I pounced upon him and several people who saw me catch him came to help me.

In a minute he was handcuffed by a policeman and taken to jail.

Lost in a Mine.

(By Philbert Trujello, Col.)

In the year 1901 I was working in a coal mine four miles west of Trinidad.

As I was new to the job, I couldn't tell one place from the other. I was sent to tell the track-layers to come down and lay some tracks on the tunnel.

The place where I had to go was C4. I went on and entered C3, an old entry where there was not a human being.

I walked about fifty yards and went in a short cut and then in another old entry, where if my light had been blown out I could never have got out in all the days of my life. I mean that I wouldn't be out alive, for if I had whistled or halloed as loud as my lungs would have helped me nobody would have heard me, only mice, which were very numerous there. So I walked in that old entry "to and fro," and couldn't find any place to go out.

I found the place at last and went out through the short cut into C3, when my lamp was out of oil. I got it out of my cap. It slipped from my hand and dropped.

But by this time men were looking all over the mine for me for it had been about three since I had left the boss and I was about breaking my head of the blows I had received on the walls trying to get out in the dark, but at last I was sitting down resting, for I had lost all hope of getting out.

Suddenly I heard some steps. I straightened up and saw a light.

I kept still, thinking that I would excite or scare whoever it was. He was walking very fast. He was about ten feet from me, then I knelt down in front of him and shouted as loud as I could, but he was scared. He wanted to run, but he couldn't, for I had grabbed him by the legs.

I found out that he was looking for me.

If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be writing this incident.

Around the World in Five Minutes.

A TALE REVEALING THE SWIFT WORKINGS OF THE BRAIN.

(By Geo. G. Allen, N. Y.)

"Just nine o'clock."

A man as he muttered these words blew out the light and rolled into bed. He was a hard-working man, and consequently in a few seconds was in the land of nod.

What happened there? Peruse!

In a far Western town this man was standing on a hotel piazza when a voice called out, "Dance, tenderfoot!" and crack! followed a pistol shot. Next he found himself on the highest peak in the Rockies wrestling with an Indian, of whom he gained mastery and pitched into the Mississippi River. From there he walked into 'Frisco, where he boarded a steamer bound for Japan,

bidding *au revoir* to America. Tom (we call him) was next aware of being in a strange land where yellow dwarfs all around wore "trolleys" (pigtales). He now began to feel pretty hungry, when a fellow tourist from the United States also, appeared and gave him a chew of tobacco to relieve that craving and became Tom's *compagnon de voyage*. Of course, this was China, and our two dreaming pards continued their travels into Siberia, north of there, where they were captured by Cossacks and thrown into the prison mines, where they had to work hard or get a trouncing.

"Nihilists!" they heard a man mutter. "Tried to kill the Czar, eh?" By some means, it is not known, Tom and his pard escaped from there, and next had to contend with a pack of hungry wolves, in the driving snows, the beasts crawling over one another to get at the humans and eat 'em up. It was hotter than an amateur journalism contest by far.

Our two pards now made a jump, that would beat Sam Patch a number of miles (one of the strange caprices of the land of nod), and landed in Moscow, Russia, where they beheld themselves striking the great bell and yelling, "Bring the cows from pasture, boys. No matter if they are moss-cows they give good milk." Tom thinking it the American Independence bell of "'76," shouted: "Ring out, oh, bell, and sound Liberty forever!"

Here, for some mysterious reason, Tom's pard left him, and Tom continued his journey down the steppes of Russia to the "City of the Dogh," Turkey, where he said he was going to tell the Sultan about the nature of the streets that the latter thought were clean, when they were not. But some one stopped him, saying:

"Hold! you have nothing against us now, for Miss Stone has been released, and is to-day on her way to the United States." At last Tom arrived in London, England, where he was arrested and escaped again, the cause being for knocking down a nobleman who insulted him.

Another fanciful freak of the land of nod is that Tom managed to cross the ocean without seeing a bit of water, it may have been by wireless telegraphy. Anyway, he woke up in New York City, his terminal, and found himself lying on the floor instead of the bed. He jumped up and lighted a lamp, and thinking it near morning, he gazed at the clock on the mantel. But, behold! Instead it was 9:05 p. m.

"Great Scott!" he cried. "I've been around the world in five minutes."

Moral—There are two sides to every life, but the average people know but one.

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Providence, R. I., May 28, 1902.

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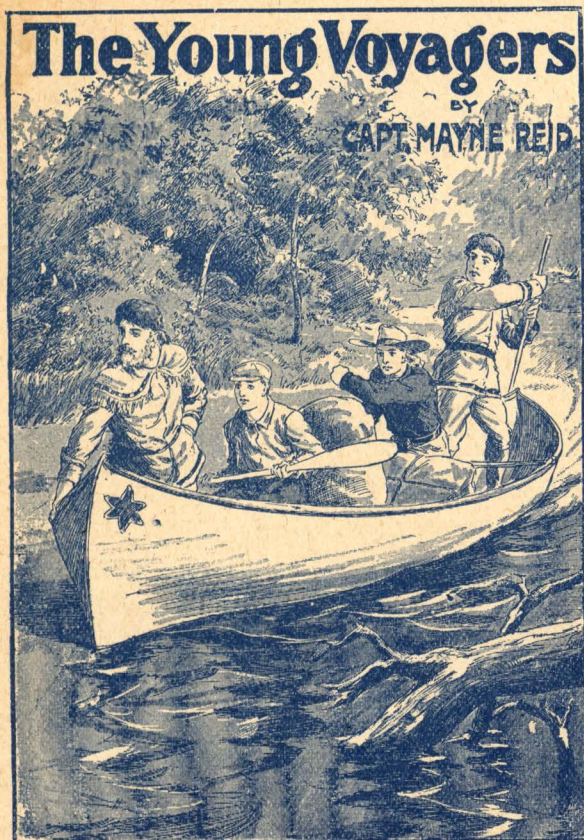
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